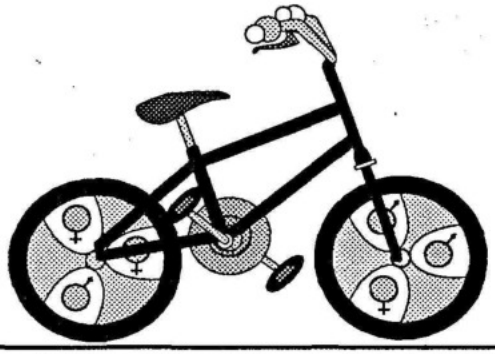

OBN NEWS

March/April 1992

OBN News, 519 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2C9 Tel: (416)-649-1356 / Fax: (416)-649-1314

The Ontario Bisexual Network (OBN) is a group formed to enable contacts among bisexual people in Ontario, and to help them undertake activities of interest. At present, these activities include: a mailing list, a newsletter, support group meetings, social activities, a political action group, education of others, information sharing, and safe sexuality information. The network's only mandate is to bring people together. — OBN Meeting, August 2, 1990.

OBN Embraces the Concept of DIVERSITY

OBN's March 19th meeting was a landmark one. A small group of five "regulars" and two new attendees tackled the issue of branching out (described in the article to the right) and came up with an elegant solution.

The following is both a summary of the ideas put forward at the meeting, and an extension of these ideas in the form of a proposal to all those who participate in the Ontario Bisexual Network.

Among the personal goals people offered during the meeting were the ideas of being *self-accepted* and *accepted by others*.

Several people also looked forward to creating *bi-positive* institutions or structures in our society. Everyone wanted an open forum where people can talk and *be themselves* and *feel safe*.

Many of us still carry a great deal of fear around the attitudes that (we think) many others in our society carry towards bisexuality. This includes negative attitudes about bisexuals among lesbians and gay men, as well as among straight men and women.

Everyone at the meeting seemed to want to gather among people who are already relatively bi-positive.

A number of people agreed that they would like to attract more people to the meetings. They would like to meet more people of all orientations.

The meeting became especially interesting when it was proposed that the bi-focus of OBN be turned upside-down: why not notice how *unique* everyone is, rather than attempt to gather people who are all *similar?*

Then the group discussed the possibility of forming a mixed group of people who are eager to accept the differences among us. Some of the concepts offered to describe such people included:

- humanist
- open-minded
- flexible
- clear-thinking
- accepting of difference
- comfortable with difference, rather than focussed on sameness
- people who will allow you to be yourself
- label-free
- generic
- les/gay/bi-positive

Elegant solutions, of course, let you have your cake and eat it too. Some of us did further thinking on the ideas raised at the meeting, and have formulated a (draft) proposal for consideration at OBN's April 2nd meeting.

(continued on page 2)

OBN Discusses Pros and Cons of "Branching Out"

OBN meetings prior to March 19th have also included considerable discussion about whether or not to expand our horizons and include people who are bi-friendly but of other orientations including lesbian, gay and straight.

Those in favour of expansion are getting tired of the focus being centred around bisexuality itself. They have noted that in order to displace society's oppression around gays, lesbians and bisexuals, *we ourselves* must also start looking at each other differently — not just through the topic of sexuality.

This would mean wider-ranging discussions and getting to know each other more fully as human beings, not just as bisexuals.

It has also become clear that some people are looking for other people of any orientation in their lives, not just bisexual. Most of us seem to want bi-positive people, but they can be lesbian, gay, straight, bi or other.

At the same time, other OBN attendees have appreciated the safety that has been created by meeting with bis only, to discuss topics around bisexuality which literally are not discussed in other places. For bis who are just coming out either to themselves or others, OBN provides a unique starting point. It is also both a major relief and a major thrill to be able to find other people who consider themselves bisexual.

OBN's March 19th meeting offered some solutions to these ongoing discussions (see article on *"Diversity"*).

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CANADIAN GAY ARCHIVES

(DIVERSITY Proposal, continued)

First, we propose that OBN should still exist. It has too much value and momentum to let it stop existing.

OBN can continue to provide a forum for bisexuals, in which we can talk among ourselves about those issues that we do not feel safe discussing with others. For those of us who are seeking the company of other bisexuals, it also allows us to find each other, and to group together with that common bond, for other activities that relate to bisexuality (e.g. political action, pride day, educational activities, etc).

OBN could retain the "first Thursday of the month" meeting time, and offer a drop-in forum for bisexuals to meet each other. The gatherings need not be formal, but could be, if anyone is willing to be facilitator on any given night.

Second, we propose that a new and independent group be formed, tentatively to be called *"Diversity"*.

"Diversity" could meet on the "third Thursday of the month" meeting time, and offer a similar forum and discussion meeting, but for "difference-positive" people of all orientations (and of any other characteristic, for that matter).

In *"Diversity"*, we would begin to achieve some of the longer-term goals OBN attendees have envisioned for our society — actually relating to people who are different from each other, *without prejudice and by welcoming the differences.*

"Diversity" may be a good way to begin to build bridges between people, that are needed if our society is ever to become truly functional and to place full value on everyone in it.

BI PERSONALS

BI MALE, 29 is looking for new bi friends, female or male, to socialize together and sample all kinds of Toronto nightlife (theatre, dance clubs, concerts, whatever!!). Write Stephen, c/o OBN, 519 Church St., Toronto, Ont. M4Y 6C9.

(Bi Personal Ads are free to persons who feel the readers of OBN News are the right market for them. Call, write or fax OBN News anytime to place an ad in the next issue.)

VIGIL ON THE BRIDGE

What is it between acquaintance and love?
What is it between friendship and love?
What is it between team spirit and love?
What is it between empathy and love?
What is it between partnership and love?
What is it between mating and love?
What is it between kinship and love?
What is it between devotion and love?
What is it between loyalty and love?
What is it between sex and love?
What are all these ways which never seem to get there?
How should one learn to value them as much as love?

Feel free to forward your answer(s) to any questions appearing in VIGIL ON THE BRIDGE to the OBN News, c/o Léo Beaulieu.

Big Response to Bi Phone Question

(by Stephen Harvey)

In late February, I recorded a question for the question-and-answer service known as "Speakeasy". I had heard questions on politics, sports, life/death and sex. It gave me inspiration to ask the questions: "Are you bisexual? If so, are you happy with your orientation, and if not, would you rather be straight or gay?"

I thought that I would get a few responses and no more. I was very surprised when the message count reached 115 in three weeks. Most of the callers said they were bisexual to various degrees and said they were happy with themselves. The only down side was that there were six biphobic calls as well.

The following is a cross-section of replies:

"I consider myself to be bi. It's more flexible and exciting and allows more chance for partners."

"Yes, I am bi. I'm very happy with my bisexuality and so is my boyfriend."

"I'm seeing men and women, but maybe I should choose one or the other. Emotionally, I think I'm going to be gay."

"I've always been straight but I've had many fantasies about being bi."

"I am and I'm happy because it doubles the amount of potential partners and it's sort of cool."

"I'm partly bisexual, I'm happy. The only real problem is finding other bis that I would be comfortable with."

"I'm not really bi but I've thought about it. I've been in a situation where things did happen, but I'm stuck in the middle because I felt rather guilty about it."

"I'm bisexual, I'm happy. I have the best of both worlds."

"I'd like to be all of the above."

Latex, not Vinyl, for Safe Sex

One of our bi safe sex researchers has confirmed that vinyl gloves are *not* suitable for safe sex purposes. The type that have been shown to be suitable are called "latex surgical sterile gloves". Consult the Aids Committee of Toronto for sources of supply. Our thanks to Dr. Harvey Fong of Toronto for acting as a medical consultant on this topic.

OBN Meeting Times

OBN Meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month, from 6 to 8 p.m., and on the third Thursday of every month from 8 to 10 p.m., at the 519 Community Center (519 Church Street, just north of Wellesley). Newsletters are available at the 519 and at every meeting.

Since a new, expanded group tentatively to be called *"Diversity"* has been proposed, which may meet on the *third Thursday* meeting time, feel free to call the OBN number on the front page to confirm which meeting will be running, prior to attending.

As of April 17th, announcements of OBN activities will be available by calling 925-XTRA, ext. 2015.